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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 FREETOWN 000025

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SUBJECT: UN PEACEKEEPERS LEAVE SIERRA LEONE, BUT FRAGILITY REMAINS

1.(U) Summary: The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) completed its peacekeeping operations on December 31, 2005, with minimal fanfare, but with notable significance. Although UNAMSIL handed responsibility for security to Sierra Leone's police and army in September 2004, the continued presence of UNAMSIL provided a psychological security blanket that helped maintain the country's stability through 2005. With UNAMSIL's departure many Sierra Leoneans are apprehensive about the ability of their security forces to maintain the peace, and possibly with good reason. UNAMSIL is transferring \$8.4 million in assets to the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL), and its civilian responsibilities to the new United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL), under a new UNSC mandate, that could prove to be a transitional model for other peacekeeping operations. The last UNAMSIL contingent, a Nigerian force guarding the war crimes Special Court in Sierra Leone (SCSL), passed its responsibilities on January 8, 2006, to a Mongolian detachment belonging to the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). The UNAMSIL Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) departed Freetown permanently on

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January 9. End Summary.

UNAMSIL'S SUCCESS

2.(U) UNAMSIL was a major success in bringing peace, security, and stability to Sierra Leone following a decade of brutal civil conflict. UNAMSIL, which began in 1999, had some initial difficulties, notably peacekeepers being disarmed and held hostage by rebels, but once its mission and rules of engagement were clarified, its operations went extremely well with no major incidents reported after peace was declared in January 2002. UNAMSIL, which at one point was the UN's largest peacekeeping operation with 17,000 troops, benefited from strong leadership and local cooperation. The two SRSG's, first (1999-2000) Oluyemi Adeniji (currently Nigeria's foreign minister) and more recently (2001-2005) Daudi Mwakawago (a past UNSC president and ex-Tanzanian minister) and the two Deputy SRSG's, first Alan Doss (now UNMIL SRSG) and then Victor Angelo, provided strong direction to the organization as well as sound advice to Sierra Leone's leaders. On the military side, Pakistan's Major General Sajjid Akram was an exemplary soldier-diplomat who not only led his multi-national force firmly, but also

worked smoothly with the civilian side of UNAMSIL and engaged the international community and Sierra Leone leadership constructively.

3.(U) UNAMSIL was enormously popular with Sierra Leoneans because the soldiers brought peace, contributed to the local economy, and were attentive to community relations. Although UNAMSIL departed without elaborate ceremonies, President Kabbah, in his New Year's message to the nation, said unequivocably, "No one can deny that UNAMSIL has turned out to be among the most successful United Nations peacekeeping operations undertaken in an internal conflict over the past three decades." At a farewell dinner hosted by the Ambassador, SRSG Mwakawago noted that only Rwanda and now Sierra Leone have seen the successful completion and withdrawal of UN peacekeeping missions in Africa in recent years.

4.(U) UNAMSIL was notable not only for its highly professional military performance, but also for its civilian outreach through Radio UNAMSIL (the only station covering the entire country) and community assistance projects conducted by soldiers of many countries, but primarily Pakistanis, who built schools, libraries, community centers, and bridges from UN funds, as well as mosques and churches from personal funds. UNAMSIL military observers served as the eyes and ears of the international community by monitoring potential unrest in the country. UNAMSIL's civilian staff also contributed importantly to democratizations and human rights monitoring in Sierra Leone.

5.(U) UNAMSIL's departure has some material benefit for Sierra Leone. The UNGA authorized the transfer of \$8.4 million of UNAMSIL assets to the GoSL, and as of December 31, an estimated \$5.4 million of assets had actually been transferred, including a joint army/police operations center

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for crisis management in Freetown and a military base in Kenema. The remaining assets will be transferred by the end of February, including a logistics facility at Hastings that is expected to become part of the State Department-funded ECOWAS depot. UNAMSIL also earned credit as they departed for donating food and non-food items to orphans and war amputees.

6.(U) SRSG Mwakawago credits Sierra Leone itself for having made UNAMSIL's success possible. At a farewell press conference on December 28, he observed that "The peace attained in Sierra Leone was a result of the cooperation of the people and government of Sierra Leone with the peacekeepers, for we know of cases elsewhere where the peacekeepers have not enjoyed the cooperation and support of the governments of the host countries." Picking up on that theme, President Kabbah told the nation, "UNAMSIL succeeded because the people of Sierra Leone made it possible to succeed" by ending the fighting and respecting the peace." Kabbah admonished his people to "remember that many people may be asking: will Sierra Leone slide back into armed conflict?"

FRAGILITY REMAINS

7.(U) Kabbah's question is a reminder that Sierra Leone is entering a post-UNAMSIL era in which stability will be less certain. Although Sierra Leone was recently buttressed by \$800 million in pledged aid for its Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan (PRSP) at a Consultative Group meeting in London, the forthcoming verdicts in SCSL trials and intense campaigning ahead of the 2007 parliamentary/presidential elections could disrupt Sierra Leone's current tranquility. Although there is no longer a rebel movement in the country and ethnic/religious differences are insignificant, the widespread extreme poverty and large numbers of unemployed

youths have created a volatility that could potentially be ignited. Although the RSLAF and SLP have clearly improved in recent years, many Sierra Leoneans are apprehensive about the ability of their security forces to manage a violent crisis. Three unconnected violent events in 2005 were not well managed by the police. Sierra Leoneans are understandably wary of their country's prospects for peace and stability given its post-independence history.

8.(U) December-January is always a period of coup rumors in Freetown because of Sierra Leone's history. For this reason and the late December forced retirement from the army of 1000 soldiers including 78 officers, the president of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists warned in a January 5 editorial on UNAMSIL's departure that "the Armed Forces have their own specific role within the constitution and should not attempt to take over the running of the state." Although the presence of a 110 foreign soldiers (including 3 U.S.) in the UK-funded International Military Assistance and Training Team (IMATT) embedded in the RSLAF is a deterrent to coups, Sierra Leoneans are nevertheless somewhat anxious.

9.(C) Another indication that troublemakers may be emboldened by UNAMSIL's departure was the January 6 warning to the British Government through opposition All People's Congress leader Ernest Bai Koroma from ex-Deputy Defense Minister and SCSL war crimes defendant Hinga Norman, who commanded the Civil Defense Force (CDF) during the war, that CDF veterans will turn to violence if the obligations to ex-combatants in the Lome Peace Accord are not met by January 14. January 17, not coincidentally, is the date when the defense will begin its case at Norman's trial at which former U.S. Ambassador John Hirsch is slated to testify in his defense. (Comment: Although Norman did not take credit for this CDF veteran action, it can be inferred from the timing that he has either initiated or endorsed it. While one can speculate that this is the threat of a desperate defendant, one cannot dismiss the possibility that it will lead to some violence. At a minimum, it shows that mischief-makers see opportunities with UNAMSIL gone. End Comment).

10.(SBU) In private conversations with the Ambassador, SRSG Mwakawago indicated that he would have preferred a six to eighteen month longer tenure for UNAMSIL to ensure a peaceful

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environment for the 2007 elections. President Kabba was also reluctant to see UNAMSIL go, but tried to put the best face on the situation as beneficial to the country. "Although we would have preferred our friends in UNAMSIL to remain in the country," he said, "unfortunately, we had to agree to this departure because prospective investors may construe this continued presence in Sierra Leone as an indication that Sierra Leone is unsafe and thereby refrain from investing in Sierra Leone with adverse repercussions on the economy and lack of employment possibilities."

UNIOSIL ARRIVES

11.(U) The United Nations is also entering a new era with the creation of a United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) under the direction of former UNAMSIL Deputy SRSG Victor Angelo as Executive Representative of the Secretary General (ERSG) to succeed UNAMSIL. SRSG Mwakawago

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repeatedly said before his departure, "UNIOSIL will not be a baby UNAMSIL," meaning that it will not have peacekeeping, but rather peacebuilding responsibilities. UNIOSIL is basically an amalgamation of UN specialized agencies remaining in Sierra Leone under Angelo, who is also the local head of the UNDP. At the Consultative Group meeting in London on November 29, Angelo announced that the UN total development budget for Sierra Leone probably will be \$68

million for 2006 and an estimated \$40 million in 2007.

12.(U) UNIOSIL, while not as robust and visible as UNAMSIL, will be more substantial than the usual UN country mission. For example, Radio UNAMSIL will continue under a new name and new management with a stronger democratization and development mandate, but with the expectation that it will be privatized after the 2007 elections. UNIOSIL will also have 20 police liaison officers to offer advice and training, and 10 military liaison officers to work with the armed forces.

MONGOLIANS COME TOO

13.(U) The last UNAMSIL military element, a Nigerian contingent, turned over responsibility for guarding the war crimes Special Court in Sierra Leone to newly arrived Mongolian soldiers on November 8. In an unusual arrangement approved by the UNSC, the Mongolians are under the command of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). The SCSL is expected to finish its mission by the end of 2006 unless war crimes fugitive Charles Taylor is extradited from Nigeria to the Court, which would prolong its tenure.

COMMENT

14.(C) Comment: The next eighteen months will be a fragile period for Sierra Leone with the UNAMSIL security blanket gone. Extreme poverty, inadequate resources, and continuing governance and corruption issues with the traditional political class in both ruling and opposition parties underlie the country's fragility. The current threat to peace, security, and stability is from the omnipresent unemployed urban youth more than from the rural discontent that sparked the war. The UN will have a leading role in keeping Sierra Leone from reverting to violence through its substantial development and democratization activities. Although UNIOSIL is robust, it considers its resources inadequate. On the other hand, with adequate resources, UNIOSIL could well be a transition model for countries like Sierra Leone that have graduated from peacekeeping but have not yet reached the stage of transformational development.
End Comment.

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